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Embezzlement charges levied

In Charlotte County, volunteer fire official was bingo treasurer

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A former assistant chief at a Charlotte County volunteer fire department has been charged with embezzling funds from his department's bingo game, a state investigator said.

Last week, William Ferrell, 56, of Wylliesburg was indicted on 19 felony counts of embezzling funds from the Bacon District Volunteer Fire Department, said Clyde E. Cristman, director of the Virginia Department of Charitable Gaming.

The 19 indictments represent six-month intervals originating in July 1995 and ending in November, when Ferrell, who served as bingo treasurer for the department, resigned from his job. The department's records indicated that more than \$70,000 is missing from the bingo operation, Cristman said.

"This is one of the reasons we educate organizations that one person should not have exclusive control of the gaming" operation, he said.

The volunteer fire department is permitted by the Department of Charitable Gaming to conduct bingo games each Saturday at the fire station in Wylliesburg. Ferrell turned himself in to the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office late Friday and was released on \$5,000 personal recognizance bond, Cristman said.

The bingo operation has brought in more than \$300,000 to support the fire department since 1995, when Bacon District was first authorized by the state to operate the games, he said.

An investigation was initiated in late December after members of the fire department reported concerns about missing money to the state gaming department, Cristman said.

On Jan. 5, a search warrant was executed at Ferrell's home by the gaming department's enforcement unit and the state police.

"Evidence recovered during the search supported information supplied by the volunteer fire department as to the alleged embezzlement of funds," Cristman said in a statement.

No trial date has been set. - Jamie C. Ruff

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